DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 401 406 CE 072 897

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TITLE Imaginaries of "East and West": Slippery Curricular Signifiers in Education.
PUB DATE May 96
NOTE 8p.; In: Constitutive Interplay midst Discourse of East and West: Modernity & Postmodernity Renderings in Adult & Continuing Education; see CE 072 896.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; *Cultural Context; Educational Philosophy; Foreign Countries; *International Relations; *International Trade; *Non Western Civilization; *Western Civilization

ABSTRACT

The labels "East and West," suggest two distinct cultural wholes. "East and West" is understood as a binary of two separate preexisting entities, which can be bridged or brought together to conjoin in an "and." This image has dominated Western modernist thought in the works of historians, anthropologists, and others. Educators, like tourists or business people, may be overly emphasizing "crossing" from one nation to another, from one culture to another, as in bridging across from land to land. By viewing a bridge not as a mere path for human transit or route for commerce, but as a dwelling place for people, one can move away from the identity-centered "East and West" and into the space between. To try to change an identity-oriented image into one that allows someone into the space between "East and West," to the site of "and," requires a discourse that can entertain "both this and that" and "neither this nor that." The "and" between "East and West" is then understood as both "and" and "not-and," allowing space for both conjunction and disjunction. In this reframing, the bridges of the Pacific Rim can be viewed as both bridges and nonbridges. This third space is an ambivalent space of both this and that, of both East and West, wherein the traditions of Western modernist epistemology can meet Eastern traditions of wisdom. (YLB)

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ED 401 406

International Adult & Continuing Education Conference (IACEC)
27-28 May 1996

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Imaginaries of "East and West": Slippery Curricular Signifiers in Education

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"The quotation marks around "East and West" indicate (as such marks do) the unstable identities that these propler names signify. These marks are insistant reminders that "East and West" is both an objective referent made objective through discourse and a discursive construct." (paraphrased from Marilyn Ivy, 1995, Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan . . . Univ. of Chicaga Press)

1.0 In the Midst of Modernist Imaginaries

Earlier in this century, my parents, then living on the Pacific Coast of North America, insisted that the era of the Pacific will come. Influenced, in part, by their urgings, I became a commerce student focussing on international trade at the University of British Columbia. For me, international trade meant plying the Pacific east and west. For the professor and the course, international trade meant plying the Atlantic. I mention this as a trace of dreams that later surfaced in other guises.

Then, the War came and my dream was shattered, "beckoning" a physical displacement that landed me in the prairies of Alberta in the field of education. In the latter years I was "professing" education, as a member and later chair of a curriculum department at the University of Alberta. While so situated, suppressed traces of the dreams about the Pacific surged forth. Let me offer two short narratives.

1.1 A Binary Image of East and West (Story 1)

I recall the time I served as a university representative on a Ministerial Curriculum Committee engaged in revising a Humanities program. Recognising that the time had come to enlarge our students' vision of the world, the committee was toying with new words in the lexicon such as "internationalization" or "globalization." At the Committee meeting the time came for titling the new course. Came the first suggestion through the mouth of the chair: "Western and non-Western Civilizations."

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The silence that followed suggested approval. I teasingly broke in and offered: "Eastern and non-Eastern Civilizations." There was a shuffling of words and bodies indicating concern for the disappearance of the word "West." Next day, the committee compromised and settled for: "Western and Eastern Civilizations."

This retitling seems to suggest an equitable recognition of both West and East. The title indeed suggests a balancing. But when we note in the texture of the course the words "Near East" and "Far East," the adjectival "near" and "far" tell us that in this geopolitical imaginary, "near" and "far" are measurements from some central point in the West.

No doubt, then, under the semblance of equivalence in the title "Western and Eastern Civilizations," the stuff of this Humanities course was somehow complicit in Eurocentricism, the kind of imaginary which in recent years Edward Said styled Orientalism-an ideological imaginary that insists on seeing the Orient as the other side of the West.

Naive, as my image may be, the structuring of the title of the Humanities course "Western and Eastern Civilizations" can be seen as a Hegelian synthesis, with "Western and non-Western Civilizations" as the thesis, "Eastern and non-Eastern Civilizations" as the antithesis. I now see what we on the Committee had done was to employ the working of an oppositional binary, which in seeming transformation was very much complicit in sustaining naively a dualistic image with which we had begun.

One more comment: in our interest in "East and West," we have completely ignored the key word "civilization" in the title, assuming, I presume, that the word "civilization" is a universal. Today, we know of the turbulence being experienced by this signifier, so associated with the Western imaginary of liberal democracy.

1.2 Asian Scholars meet Western Scholars (Story 2)

Fortunately, on the staff of the University of Alberta, was a Korean media scholar, Dr. C.Y. Oh. So when he told us that he was visiting Korea, we requested him to be open to possibilities of meaningful contacts with educational life in Korea. He brought forth two notions:

(1) With increasing interest in English as a Second Language, he began to arrange summer visitations of ESL teachers to improve their speaking and writing.

(2) With increasing interest in Korean educators' Western scholarship, he sought out possible graduate students. The keen interest of these Korean scholars leaving Korea to come to us compelled us to ask seriously, "What is the meaning of education in an East-West context?"

Certainly, we said, they ought to come into contact with Western scholarship. But the very thought of them coming to us from Korea to study Western scholarship, and return with the same, was, it seemed, reducing education to a commodity view of education.

When they arrived we asked them why they had come to the West, and we tried to remind them that their space of life lies between Korean/Asian scholarship and Western scholarship and that merely to carry home a commodity called Western scholarship seemed wanting. We asked

them, insistently, that in their dissertations, each include at least a chapter on the experiences of Korean scholars' living life at a Western University. For us it was an opportunity to question ourselves seriously, what it is to invite Eastern scholars in our midst.

Thus began our long standing contact with Korean scholars, the University of Alberta becoming a beneficiary in the warm scholarly and cultural interchanges that are still ongoing.

2.0 "East and West" within the Imaginary of Cultural Identity.

I return to the key signifier of the title of the conference -"East and West." Somehow within my imaginary, I am pulled by the capitalized terms, "East" and "West." Why am I so attracted? I respond, "I must be habituating an imaginary attuned to the substantive." By this I mean that within this imaginary, each of "East" and "West" is articulated assuming presence of its own identity-geographically, culturally, linguistically.

Stuart Hall provides us the following. Within this imaginary, according to Hall (1990, p. 223), cultural identity is defined in terms of "one shared culture, a sort of collective . . . which people with a shared history and ancestry held in common." Further, "our cultural identities reflect the common historical references and shared cultural codes which provides, as one people, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning. . . ." For Hall, this oneness is" the truth, the essence. . . . of [people's] experience. It is the identity which we must discover, excavate to bring to light and express through representation."

The labels, "East" and "West" suggest two distinct cultural wholes, "Eastern culture" and "Western culture," each identifiable standing distinctly separate from each other.

The earlier curriculum narrative of "Western and Eastern Civilizations" was premised on this imaginary within which these two separate civilizations were claimed to be fashioned.

So understood, the term "East" and "West" is rendered as a binary of two separate pre-existing entities, which can be bridged or brought together to conjoin in an "and" when we speak of "East and West." This imaginary has been the dominant Western modernist imaginary deeply ingrained by the works of historians, anthropologists and the like.

Even more, at the University of British Columbia, this imaginary is dominant in the culture of Western education. For example, with interest in the Asia Pacific, UBC has established "the Centre for Asian Studies" consisting of the sub-categories of Korean Studies, Chinese Studies, Japanese Studies, South-East Asian Studies and Indo-Asian Studies-each a solitude formulated into a separate identity. I cite this illustration to indicate the legitimacy of this imaginary in university educational programs in the West.

3.0 The Image of "Crossing" between East and West.

Another term in the lexicon of "East and West" has been the word, "cross-cultural," emphasizing movement in getting across from one culture to another. A few years ago, in

Vancouver, an international conference in the Humanities was held under the label "Pac Rim." This label pointed to the conference's interest in movement at the rim of the Pacific Ocean. For the conferees, it seems, the rim portion of the Pacific was considered significant.

By invitation, I wrote a short article titled "Bridges that Rim the Pacific." Concerned that educators, like tourists or business people, may be overly emphasizing "crossing" from one nation to another, from one culture to another, i.e., in bridging across from land to land, I chose to play with the signifier "bridge/bridging" to query the prevailing imaginary that allows such language.

I pondered upon the usual meaning of the word "bridge" in our daily locution. Bridges abound-small bridges, long bridges, ships and planes that bridge the Pacific moving goods and people. Today, we revel in the remarkable speed, life-lines we call them, and give thanks to all these bridges (if we remember to thank them) for helping us to get across from one place to another, the speedier the better, with little time wasted the better.

But if I go to an Oriental garden, I am likely to come upon a bridge, aesthetically designed, with decorative railings, pleasing to our eyes. Such a bridge is very unlike the many bridges that cross the Han River here in Seoul. But on this bridge, we are in no hurry to cross over; in fact, such bridges urge us to linger. This in my view is a Heideggerian bridge, a site or clearing in which earth, sky, mortals and divine in their longing to be together belong together. So I wrote, "Bridges in the Pacific are not mere paths for human transit, nor are they mere routes for commerce and trade. They are dwelling places for people. The Pacific Rim invites... educators to transcend instrumentalism to understand what it means to dwell together humanly" (Aoki, 1988).

In the language of this episode, I can see myself trying to move away from the identity-centred "East and West" and into the space between East and West. And in so doing, I leaned on Heidegger's well-known critique of instrumentalism and technology, trying to undo the instrumental sense of "bridge." But have I succeeded in moving away from the identity sense of bridge?

4.0 A Short Interlude on Sign Theory

At this point let us lean on sign theory that may assist us in understanding our imaginaries. Saussure, a well-known structural linguist, showed us that the meaning of a sign is an artifact based on the relationship between signifier and signified. Jacques Lacan, a post structural psychoanalyst, reworked Saussure to enable him to split signs into doubled meanings.

$$\text{Sign} = \frac{\text{S (signifier)}}{\text{s (signified)}}$$

Within the first imaginary, the meaning of a sign assumes a vertical relationship between signifier and signified, wherein the bar between signifier (S) and signified (s) is transparent. The signifier has direct access to the signified. So for example, my identity can be portrayed by showing forth the deep me. In the past, ethnographers claimed possibility of accurate portrayals of

existing cultures through contact with its essence. The signifiers "East" and "West" that I have dealt with so far have been understood within this vertical imaginary.

And even when I attempted to shift to the bridging space between East and West, my portrayal, based on Heidegger's ontological essentialism-a bridge as a site of being-was framed vertically.

But Lacan's second imaginary assumes opaqueness of the bar between signifier and signified; the signifier is barred from access to the signified. Within this imaginary, meaning arises in the midst of signifiers, horizontally arranged. In the midst of signifiers "East" and "West"?

5.0 Returning to "East and West"

I return to the terms "East and West," to try to dissolve my identity-oriented imaginary to one that allows me into the space between "East and West," to the site of "and" in a non-essentialist way.

In order to loosen my attachment to East or West as "thing," I call upon a Chinese character, (wu). It reads "nothing" or "no-thing." But I note that in "no-thing" there is already inscribed the word "thing," as if to say "'nothing' cannot be without 'thing'," and "'thing' cannot be without 'no thing'." For me, such a reading is already a move away from the modernist binary discourse of "this or that," or the imaginary grounded in an essence called "thing." And now I am drawn into the fold of a discursive imaginary that can entertain "both this and that," "neither this nor that"-a space of paradox, ambiguity and ambivalence.

So textured, I return to the "and" between "East and West" re-understanding "and" as "both 'and' and 'not-and'" that allows a space for both conjunction and disjunction.

So reframed, I revisit Heidegger's bridges, bridges of the Pacific Rim, and rethink of them as being both bridges and non-bridges. I revisit the Korean graduate students who studied with us, and rethink of their spaces as third spaces between Western scholarship and Eastern scholarship.

Here, "identity" is no mere depiction of the vertical but moveso "identification", a becoming in the space of difference. Of this imaginary on identity/identification, Stuart Hall (1990, p. 223) states:

> It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo consistent transformation. Far from being eternally fixed to some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous play of histories, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere recovery of the past, which is waiting to be found. . . . identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within. . . .

So understood, the tensioned space of both "and/not-and" is a space of conjoining and disrupting, indeed a generative space of possibilities, a space wherein in tensioned ambiguity newness emerges.

6.0 Where Newness Emerges

Allow me to bring forth a small example of how languages and cultures interplay in the third space of "and/not and." In a conversation with a Canadian Sinologist, our talk turned to the generative space of ambivalence between the Chinese language and the English language.

The word "individual" (an undivided person, a whole person) is alien to Orientals. Hence, in that space between the English language and the Chinese language, a term was created:

(divided person) 人 　　人 Individual (not-divided)

In composing the term, fragments were juxtaposed. The fragment ( ) means "The past is a reality that can be accessed and boxed." The fragments ( ) and ( ) mean "person," with the two lines saying that it takes at least two to make a person. In other words, a person is divided. So here is a version of "individual" transformed in the space between languages with traces of both individual identity and doubled identity-indeed, a hybrid. What kind of newness is this? Of such a construct, Ernesto Laclau (1995, P. 16) has this to say:

> [H]ybridization does not necessarily mean decline through a loss of identity; it can also mean empowering existing identities through the opening of new possibilities. Only a conservative identity, closed on itself, could experience hybridization as a loss.

Indeed, this imaginary allows envisaging of third spaces between "East and West," between and among diverse segments of the East, or between and among diverse segments of the West, as spaces of generative possibilities, spaces where newness can flow.

Conclusion:

The title of the Conference suggests to me that Korean scholars in education are alert to the postmodern deconstruction of Western modernity. And in the doubled movement which goes on in deconstruction-that is, the questioning of modernist imaginaries and their displacements-interesting work has been ongoing.

But in this doubled movement, there seem to be scholars on the double to cross from the modernist to the postmodern. In this hurry, there may have been a neglect to consider the space between doubled moves. This is the Third Space (using Honie Bhabha's term) of ( ) that Asians seem to know about in their traditions of wisdom.

I mark that third space as an ambivalent space of both this and that, of both East and West, wherein the traditions of Western modernist epistemology can meet the Eastern traditions of wisdom. Could it be that such a space is the ambivalent space of modernism and non-modernism? The ambivalent space of "East and West"

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